

“Seeking: Can These Bones Live Again?”  
Ezekiel 37:1-14 & John 11

“If fear were an energy source, we could all power our homes and cars for a year.” These words by Rev. Danielle Shroyer have been resonating with me this week. There is an abundance of fear in and around us these days. Politicians, newscasters, and advertisers amplify it to make sure that we stay tuned to their messages. Yet, the greatest illusion in life is that fear can power anything redemptive and life-giving. Beyond the basic instinct for survival, fear often keeps us locked into states of dysfunction and pain. Shroyer’s words remind me of the movie “Monster’s Inc.” where the monsters believed that the screams of children were the best energy source to power their city. Here is a training scene for one monster who was supposed to scare a child by being under their bed: <https://youtu.be/tp3jLCxVb7M>. What the monsters discover later through many twists and turns is that laughter was the best source of energy.

This is the message for us today through the question of this week: “Can these bones live again?” Responding in fear is not the answer. Trusting in God is the way through our challenges in life. We have two stories this week. The first one is from the prophet Ezekiel and the second one is from Jesus. In both situations death had come and seemed to be the end, but that was the illusion of fear.

For the prophet Ezekiel, his message of faith and hope came at a time of great destruction and fear around the year 587 BCE. The armies of Babylon had forced the surrender of the rebellious city Jerusalem and deported the Judean king and many Judean leaders to Babylon (2 Kings 24:10-16). Among the first wave of the deported was the young priest Ezekiel, whom God later called in Babylon to the office of prophet. Before the Exile, Ezekiel brought a word from God about the need to repent and reform, but after the tragedy, Ezekiel gave the people of Israel a strong reminder of the presence of God with them. The prophet knew that it was much easier to believe that God was with the people of Israel when things were going well and that it was much harder to know that when all seemed to have been lost.

The prophet Ezekiel seeing a vision of being in a valley of dry bones and then having the breath of God to revive them back to life. This is a battlefield scene where dead bodies are accumulated in a valley. But through the power of the Holy Spirit, these dead bodies come back to life. This is a powerful metaphor for hope in the midst of terrible loss and pain. Let’s watch this video from the Bible Project about this vision:

[https://youtu.be/SDeCWW\\_Bnyw](https://youtu.be/SDeCWW_Bnyw)

It is an incredible vision of resurrection and recreation. Even when the people thought this was the end, it was not, for nothing is too impossible for God! Despite this being the worst pain of their life together, despite this being the valley of dry bones for a priest, we have Ezekiel see a vision of incredible hope, a miraculous vision of transformation and healing. The vision is for the dry dead bones to come back to life and the key to the vision is to note how these bones come to life. They come back because of God’s healing love.

What Ezekiel was given to proclaim was not a simple message that says, “Oh, it’s okay don’t cry now, everything is going to be alright.” It was not a message that denied the reality of the depth of the pain and suffering of the Israelites. Ezekiel spent several years in lament for the injustices of Israel and their lack of faithfulness to God. He was fully aware of the decay and pain of his society. Yet, he knew that the only way through this was through the Spirit of God. His message was a message of hope through faith.

The same kind of message was given through the story of the raising of Lazarus. In our Bible story we look at how Jesus responded in a time of great fear. The obvious situation of fear was that of the sisters of Lazarus. Mary and Martha were faced with the fear of losing their brother. They were afraid and in need of help and support. They sent word to Jesus to come and help. This leads us to the less obvious situation of fear in this story. It is the threat which Jesus was facing for going back to Jerusalem. Jesus was in the Jordan River region, and it was very dangerous for him to go back to the Jerusalem scene. He was a wanted man by the religious authorities of Jerusalem (the Judeans). He needed to stay away. It was a suicide mission for him to go to Bethany, near Jerusalem and to perform a sign there. But Jesus showed no fear or retreat! That is why the sign of resurrecting Lazarus became a very important metaphor for the followers of Jesus. It became a source of hope and courage in the face of fear, persecution, and despair. Jesus took death which was a symbol of pain and defeat and transformed it into a symbol of hope and healing.

Like the great prophets of Israel, Elijah and Elisha, who raised people from the dead and brought healing to many, Jesus came in the same way to bring healing and renewal to the people of Israel. Both prophets, Elijah and Elisha, were rejected and persecuted by the kings and religious authorities of their time. They spoke truth to power and sought justice for the poor and oppressed and they paid the price for their prophetic words and deeds. Jesus followed in their footsteps. Jesus saw and proclaimed a radically different vision for the people of God.

Let’s listen to John 11:30-44

<sup>30</sup> Now Jesus had not yet come to the village, but was still at the place where Martha had met him. <sup>31</sup> The Judeans who were with her in the house, consoling her, saw Mary get up quickly and go out. They followed her because they thought that she was going to the tomb to weep there. <sup>32</sup> When Mary came where Jesus was and saw him, she knelt at his feet and said to him, “Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.” <sup>33</sup> When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Judeans who came with her also weeping, he was greatly disturbed in spirit and deeply moved. <sup>34</sup> He said, “Where have you laid him?” They said to him, “Lord, come and see.” <sup>35</sup> Jesus began to weep. <sup>36</sup> So the Jews said, “See how he loved him!” <sup>37</sup> But some of them said, “Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man have kept this man from dying?”

<sup>38</sup> Then Jesus, again greatly disturbed, came to the tomb. It was a cave, and a stone was lying against it. <sup>39</sup> Jesus said, “Take away the stone.” Martha, the sister of the dead man, said to him, “Lord, already there is a stench because he has been dead four

days.”<sup>40</sup> Jesus said to her, “Did I not tell you that if you believed, you would see the glory of God?”<sup>41</sup> So they took away the stone. And Jesus looked upward and said, “Father, I thank you for having heard me. <sup>42</sup>I knew that you always hear me, but I have said this for the sake of the crowd standing here, so that they may believe that you sent me.”<sup>43</sup> When he had said this, he cried with a loud voice, “Lazarus, come out!”<sup>44</sup> The dead man came out, his hands and feet bound with strips of cloth, and his face wrapped in a cloth. Jesus said to them, “Unbind him, and let him go.”

This is another incredible story that became a strong reminder for the followers of Jesus to remember that no matter what happened to them, God’s Spirit will bring new life even to the most desperate of our human situations. Danielle Shroyer writes, “God doesn’t ask us to believe the situation will get better. God asks us to believe that life itself will not, in the end, cower under the pressure of human destruction. Abundant life persists. This is what makes it eternal.”

A great example of this came to me this past week as I read the story of Gary Tyler, a man who was wrongfully convicted and imprisoned at the age of 17 in Louisiana where he spent 41 years. He was only released a couple of years ago. What is incredible about his story is that he sought renewal and life even under the harshest of circumstances. But through the care of a group that went into the prison to share art with them, Gary Tyler discovered his gift for fabric art through quilting (show images).

Here is a clip from an interview with him: <https://youtu.be/loPR0-6zI9I>

I invite you to pray in the Spirit of Ezekiel, Lazarus, Jesus, and Gary Tyler to invite hope and renewal to all the valleys of dry bones in your life or in our world today. Take a moment to pray for hope in any hopeless situation. Amen.